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SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV KDEM VE

SUBJECT: PRIMERO JUSTICIA: FLEDGLING OPPOSITION

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ABELARDO A. ARIAS FOR 1.4 (D)

Summary

¶1. (C) Primero Justicia President Julio Borges and Sec Gen Jose Luis Mejias lamented the opposition's inability to offer the public an alternative to Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. Meeting with the Ambassador March 22, they outlined the party's political strategy, noting especially its efforts to address social issues. The Ambassador suggested ways the Embassy could help show alternatives to GOV social programs. Primero Justicia is one of the few Venezuelan political parties with vision, but the tiny group, now focusing more on organization building, is not prepared to challenge Chavez's revolutionary juggernaut. End summary.

¶2. (C) Primero Justicia (PJ) party president Julio Borges and secretary general Jose Luis Mejias paid a courtesy call on the Ambassador March 22. Calling the opposition's predicament "the worst of all worlds," Borges and Mejias derided President Hugo Chavez's critics for their inability to statistically evaluate the administration's performance and for their lack of familiarity with GOV social missions. According to Borges, the opposition must not victimize Chavez; rather, it has to generate expectations and show the GOV is unable to meet them. In addition to being critical, he contended, the opposition has to offer an alternative to the GOV. Noting that the opposition let Chavez have a monopoly on social-issue discourse, Borges said PJ planned to launch a "street justice" program aimed at disseminating the party's message to the Venezuelan poor.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador described how the Embassy could use its public presence to demonstrate other options to GOV social programs. In response to Borges's suggestion that the USG help build political institutions and civil society, the Ambassador said the Embassy was considering sponsoring English language classes, bringing back the Peace Corps (in the event of GOV approval), and establishing libraries, especially in poor areas.

¶4. (C) Borges discussed PJ's need to devise a credible short-term strategy to offer the public an alternative to both the GOV and the traditional opposition. He described three goals the party had for its own development:

--PJ plans to hold a party congress in July to revise its ideological platform and public policies.

--PJ hopes to form 14,000 local networks via its "justice with the people" grassroots movement by the end of the year.

--The party intends to consolidate its party machinery with an eye towards holding internal elections next year.

¶5. (C) Borges and Mejias described a four-hour meeting they had with the Minister of Education (Note: whether he was referring to Higher Education Minister Samuel Moncada or Education and Sports Minister Aristobulo Isturiz was unclear). Borges said the Minister's invitation to meet to discuss ideas came as a surprise because there has been no communication between the ministries and the opposition. The ministers do not even greet opposition deputies in the hallways, he said.

Comment

¶6. (C) Primero Justicia is probably the most pro-active opposition party. First, PJ is perhaps the only opposition party that has articulated to us a political strategy and has demonstrated an urgency to recreate its public image and message. Second, it is one of the few to build alliances with other parties since the collapse of the Coordinadora Democratica after the October 2004 regional elections. Third, PJ is one of the only parties engaging in long-term planning; other PJ contacts told us in mid-2004 that the PJ's first priority was to prepare for the national assembly elections, currently scheduled for December 2005.

McFarland

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